

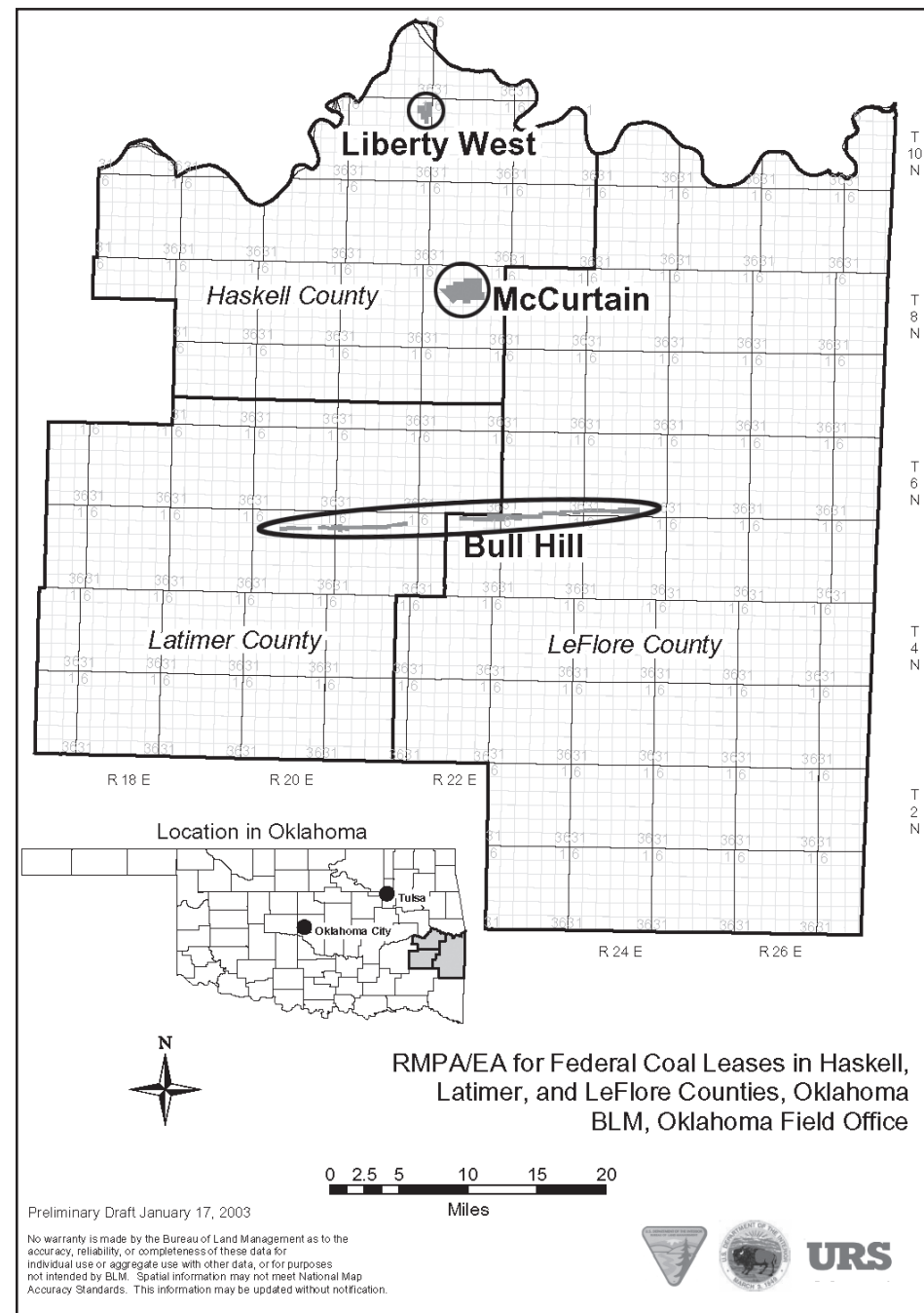
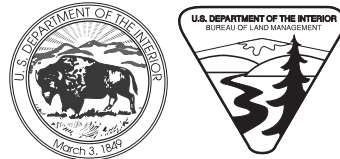
Written comments should address: (1) issues to be considered; (2) whether the planning criteria are adequate for the issues; (3) reasonable and feasible alternatives to examine; and/or (4) relevant information having a bearing on the RMPA/EA.

The preaddressed comment form accompanying this scoping packet can be used to submit written comments at any time during the

scoping period, which ends on **May 23, 2003.**

As mentioned above, once the Proposed RMPA/EA is completed, the document will be released to the public to review for a period of 30 days. During that period, the BLM will accept comments on the adequacy of the document. BLM will maintain a mailing list throughout the process. Information materials will be distributed

during the process to those on the mailing list. In addition, anyone interested in more information or being added to the mailing list should contact BLM's team leaders Doug Cook at (918) 621-4124 or Keith Tyler at (405) 790-1015.



PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS

Please Attend!

Monday, May 5, 2003
5:30 to 8:30 pm
(presentation at 6:15 pm)
McCurtain High School
Auditorium
Highway 26 and Cole
McCurtain, Oklahoma

Tuesday, May 6, 2003
5:30 to 8:30 pm
(presentation at 6:15 pm)
Eastern Oklahoma
State College
Student Union Building—
East Cafeteria
1301 West Main
Wilburton, Oklahoma

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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Resource Management Plan Amendment and Environmental Impact Statement Scoping Notice



April 2003

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Oklahoma Field Office, is preparing an amendment to its 1994 Resource Management Plan (RMP) and completing an Environmental Assessment (EA) on the amendment for three competitive Federal coal lease sales covering lands in Haskell, Latimer, and LeFlore counties, Oklahoma. The RMP Amendment (RMPA) would incorporate the three Lease Application Areas (LAAs), which total approximately 6,883 acres of previously unleased coal and are part of the Federal mineral estate.

This Scoping Notice is to inform you about the beginning of the planning process and an upcoming **PUBLIC MEETING** (details on back), and to request your comments on the scope of the RMPA/EA for proposed coal leasing and subsequent development.

Why Amend the Resource Management Plan?

BLM, under the Secretary of the Interior, is the Federal agency responsible for leasing Federally owned coal, and the Federal Coal Leasing Amendments Act of 1976 requires that coal leases be issued in conformance with a comprehensive land use plan. In 1994, the BLM Oklahoma Field Office completed such a land use plan – the RMP for Oklahoma – which included Federal mineral resources in Haskell, Latimer, and LeFlore counties; however, the RMP did not address the areas that are the subject of this current RMPA.

In February and June of 2002, BLM received three applications from Farrell-Cooper Mining Company for competitive coal lease sales in Haskell, Latimer, and LeFlore counties. The sizes and locations of these three areas are as follows(see map on back):

- **Liberty West**, 640 acres in parts of Sections 1 and 12, T10N, R12E in Haskell County;
- **McCurtain**, 2,380 acres in parts of Sections 8-11, 14-17, T8N, R22E in Haskell County; and
- **Bull Hill**, 3,863.17 acres in parts of Sections 9-12, T5N, R20E, and Sections 1-3 and 7-10, T5N, R21E in Latimer County and Sections 4-6, T5N, R23E, Sections 31-34, T6N, R24E; Sections 33-36, T6N, R23E and Sections 1-3, T5N, R22E in LeFlore County.

The total 6,883.17 acres of Federal mineral estate is administered by BLM and the surface is privately owned.

These proposed new coal leases were not included in the 1994 RMP, primarily because the tracts represented lands that previously had been mined early in twentieth century. However, improvements in mining technology and economics would now allow mining in these areas again. In order for BLM to consider coal lease sales in these areas, an amendment to the RMP must be made to include them. Lands already considered in the 1994 Oklahoma RMP and as amended in 1996 need not be addressed.

In addition, the EA will identify the potential impacts that implementation of the RMPA could have on the environment and identify appropriate measures to mitigate those impacts. The EA will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as well as Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and other associated guidance.

What are the Steps in the Planning Process?

The planning and EA process, which is scheduled for completion in approximately 12 months, consists of nine basic steps including (1) issue identification, (2) planning criteria development, (3) data collection, (4) management situation analysis, (5) alternative formulation, (6) alternative evaluation, (7) preferred alternative selection, (8) plan amendment selection, and (9) monitoring. The steps of the planning process are shown in the flow chart below. At this early stage in the process, the range, or scope, of public and agency issues and concerns is being identified through comments received in response to this notice and during the public scoping meetings to be held on **May 5 and 6, 2003** (please see next page).

Following the initial scoping phase, the study team will prepare an inventory of resource information by gathering data representing the existing conditions of the human, natural, and cultural resources within the planning area. Using the issues identified during this initial scoping phase, data collected, and existing management direction from the current RMP, the team will conduct an analysis to determine if the LAAs are: (1) acceptable for further coal leasing consideration with standard stipulations; (2) acceptable for consideration with special stipulations; or (3) unacceptable for further coal leasing consideration.

A range of reasonable alternatives, including an alternative considering no action as required by NEPA, will be developed and analyzed in the EA. Through the scoping process,

the public will assist in developing the alternatives to be addressed in the planning and EA process.

Following an in-depth analysis of the impacts associated with the alternatives analyzed, one alternative will be selected as the agency-preferred alternative, which will be documented in the Proposed RMPA/EA. Once the Proposed RMPA/EA has been released, the opportunity for public review will be announced through the media and a *Federal Register* notice. It is anticipated that the Proposed RMPA/EA will be available for public review and comment in the Fall of 2003. After a 60-day Governor's Consistency Review and a 30-day public protest period, BLM will issue a Decision Record. It is anticipated that the Decision Record and RMPA/EA will be published in the Spring of 2004.

What are the Preliminary Planning Criteria?

Preliminary planning criteria guide the development of the RMPA/EA. The preliminary planning criteria identified to date include, but will not be limited to the following: (1) recognize valid existing rights; (2) follow existing laws, executive orders, regulations, and BLM policy and program guidance; (3) collaborate with agencies and the public; (4) consider adjacent land use to minimize land use conflicts; (5) consider actions by other groups; (6) develop reasonable alternatives; (7) avoid unbalanced analysis; (8) use science-based analysis with relevant and current data; (9) consider social and economic conditions and environmental justice; (10) provide for public safety and welfare; and (11) consider effects on natural, human, and cultural resources.

What are the Preliminary Resource Concerns?

BLM anticipates further development of coal resources in Oklahoma to be the main issue addressed in the RMPA. Accordingly, preliminary natural, human or social, and cultural resource concerns have been identified by BLM personnel and include the following:

- Natural: geology and soils, water quality, air quality, vegetation, wildlife, special status species, and noxious weeds
- Human or Social: access and traffic, visual resources, noise, social and economic conditions, land use, Native American issues and concerns, tribal government relationships, environmental justice, and application of unsuitability criteria
- Cultural: historical and archaeological resources and paleontological resources

- Which Federal minerals should be leased with constraints?
- Which leasing stipulations from the existing RMP are appropriate and sufficient to protect resource values?

How can the Public Participate in the Project?

The planning and EA process is scheduled for completion in about 12 months. There will be many opportunities for the public to be informed and to participate in the process. The first opportunity will be at the upcoming public open house meetings. These meetings will begin with a brief presentation to provide an overview of the planning and EA process. Maps of the proposed LAAs will be available at the open houses for review. Details for the meetings are provided below and also will be announced through media releases. Your comments are important to us, particularly at this early stage of the process. **Please attend!**

In addition, industry and other interested parties are asked to provide any information that will be useful in meeting the requirements of the Federal Coal Management Program, as defined in Title 43, Code of Federal Regulations, § 3420, including the application of coal planning screens. Information resulting from this call for information will be used to determine the potential for coal development and likelihood of conflict with other resources.

What Decisions will Result from the RMPA/EA?

Anticipated decisions include the following:

- Which Federal minerals should be available for leasing and subsequent activities?
- Are standard lease terms and conditions sufficient for the proposed leases?

